
Perils of
Candy Cuthway
Richard Shekari

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By Richard Shekari

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Dedication

To my little furry companion, Shakur, the cat. Even though we only spent a short time together, you had a huge effect on me.

Ace

'*Where would I be in the next few years? Probably with three kids, and who would be their father, I wonder. Where would I live? In a big mansion or a small beautiful cottage, and would it be by the riverbank or in a big city? I wonder if there would be a future between me and Jake. Well, as they say; what will be, will be. The future is not mine to see!*'

"Future...Oh my God! Mellissa and Laura will kill me!" said Candy Cuthway as the waves of reality nuked her off her stargaze. She hurriedly put her diary in her bag, for this isn't the first time its rich contents have been abruptly interrupted by a more pressing matter.

"Tessy! Wait for me!" she yelled at her colleague as she switched off the light on the table of her cubicle and ran out of what she regarded as a prison of an office, one of the modest spaces of RSL & Partners, a real estate firm within the busiest streets of Nottega, her dream town.

Candy and her passive colleague finally managed to rock their body to a pop song playing on the car stereo, as they drove through town in the red minivan.

"Now, jokes aside Candy," Tessy said, "we've known each other for like two years, right? Don't you think it's time you've settled for marriage"

"Tessy you got married at what? Thirty four, am I right? Come on, I still got time! Plus, it's not that I'm desperate or anything! So, chill, okay!" said Candy as she stared at Tessy in disdain.

Candy, slightly distracted got to the point that she almost ran over a mourning crowd as they marched towards the town square holding candles in memory of the victims of the Undango

massacre. A tragedy which gripped the perplexed people of this district in its fourth year anniversary.

"Yes you're right, I may be forty one now but I sure don't wish to die this soon, please drive with caution!" said Tessy.

"It scares me whenever I hear people say these words!" Candy responded.

"Yup, there!" pointed Tessy, "I'll alight right there!"

"Alright, let me get a good spot," said Candy as she parked, "is here okay?"

"Yes love, and thank you so much! See you tomorrow! Kiss! Kiss!" said Tessy who got out of the car, "give a thought to what I said okay?"

"Okay! Kiss! Kiss!" replied Candy turning up the volume of the car stereo as she masked to conceal the noise and zoomed off.

Candy sang along as she steered through the shortcuts to avoid traffic, it took her about half an hour to get to her destination. Her cell phone rang, she picked it via her Bluetooth headset, "Hello!"

"Hi, it's Jim! Have you seen my messages?" asked the caller.

"Yes I did, Jimmy, but I've told you several times; I already got a man!" she said, staring through the rear view mirror as she reversed.

"Well, can I at least see you now just for a couple of minutes?" asked Jimmy, "hello, are you there?"

"No, it won't be possible for us to meet; besides, Mellissa is waiting for me at the cafe as we speak!" she smoothly pulled the handbrake as she parked.

"You didn't...tell her, did you?" Jimmy asked anxiously.

"She doesn't know anything, but if you keep calling me like this, Jimmy I'll have no choice but to tell her!" Candy said, "She's a nice girl, and she loves you. But most importantly, she's my friend, okay? Goodbye!"

"Aight! Bye Candy!" replied Jimmy in a weak but respectful tone.

Candy ended the call, removed the headset from her ear and put it in the glove compartment. She switched on the interior light and looked into the vanity mirror then licked her lips, "Hmm!" she sighed as she opened her purse, pulled out a red lipstick setting her eyes on the mirror again. Her phone rang as she applied the lipstick, she picked it, "What's up girl? I'm right outside, be with you in a minute!" Candy hung up then applied some make-up and some perfume, she kissed the wind with a smile admiring her scrumptious look in the mirror.

Candy walked out of her red minivan, parked outside and not far from the cafe; the regular spot where she and her friends usually hung out, the very same place she met Jake, her boyfriend eight months earlier. She smiled and waved her hand in the air as she sighted her two girlfriends, Mellissa and Laura through the glass entrance.

"Hey gals!" said Candy as she shut the glass door behind her.

"You're a late, CC!" said Mellissa, "Aren't you tired of always footing the bills?" referring to their common ritual.

"My boss didn't leave the office until 6:45 and it took me about thirty minutes to get here!" replied Candy, "Hey Laura, I like your hair!"

"Why thank you," Laura replied, "but I thought you said your boss was out of town?"

"Well, so we thought," answered Candy, grabbing a stool, "for that's all we staff had hoped for, apparently he forgot tomorrow is his kid's graduation bla-bla-bla!"

"Oh, Jimmy called about an hour ago," said Mellissa, "he asked after you!"

"Oh, really?" Candy said, "How is he doing?"

"He's okay, it's just that he's been busy lately, you know!" Mellissa relayed.

"I don't think I can marry anybody working for the Feds!" said Laura.

"Shut it girlfriend," Candy interjected, "yours is even worse! Who dates reporters these days, when we live in troubled times?"

"Oh, shut up! No way, I'm cool with Shoham's choice of job!" Laura said in defence.

"Yeah right, aren't we all?" Candy implied.

As the ladies continued on, in defence of their partner's occupations, a fine young man of average build walked towards them.

"Hello! I was wondering if you ladies could join me and my two cool friends over there," he said.

"Well, hello! Oh, um...We um...we would love to, but we actually have like a small meeting, you know, girls stuff!" a nervous Laura responded, as she couldn't take her eyes off the enchanted fellow.

"Oh, I see. Well, maybe when you're done, you can join us, what do you say?" asked the young man.

"Sure," said Mellissa, "be with you in a jiffy!"

"Yeah, once we're done analysing your butt and physique!" said Laura, "I mean, analysing the uh, both our physics...assignment! We just gained admission into the University."

"Okay then!" he responded as he walked back smiling on his way to his buddies.

"Laura?" Mellissa whispered.

"Hmm, cute guy," Candy said, "but he ain't my type!"

"Liar! You didn't notice the clean cut hunk by the counter, did you?" Mellissa asked.

Candy turned then grinned, "Oh my God," she said, "and he didn't tell me he was going to be here!" referring to the handsome man by the wine counter, "Give me a minute gals! Be right back!"

"Go get him tigress!" a mocking Mellissa said as they all laughed.

"Grrrr!" exclaimed Candy playfully, she left her items with the ladies as she approached the stud looking male.

"Hey handsome, mind buying a lady a drink?"

"You sexy lil'thang," said the young man as he turned, "Come over here!" wrapping his arm around her waist with a sterning grip as he plunged her succulent lips over his, "how's my ace doing this evening?"

"Mmm...she's fine! Now you've got red lipstick all over!" she smiled, as she wiped his lips with her thumb and kissed him again, "marking my territory!"

"She doesn't need to mark any territory that she owns! Jake belongs to her. I've missed you so much," he said gazing into her eyes.

"Missed you too, baby! So, what's my Jake doing here? He never told his Queen he was going to be here this evening!" Candy emphasised as she poked his chest.

"I'm on a mission tonight!" Jake responded.

"A mission, huh?" Candy asked.

"Where's your phone?" Jake asked.

"On the table, right over there!" she said, "What, you wanna make a call?"

"Nope!" he said, "Got this new app you would love!"

"Should I get it now?" she asked.

Jake smiled, "Yeah!?" he raised his eyebrows for a split second then dropped them back.

"Baby, what are you up to?" Candy pouted, "Okay, I'll be right back!" she kissed him as she left to get the phone.

Candy unzipped her purse and pulled out her cell phone, as she was about to go back, Mellissa held her hand, "Candy, you know why we are all here, right?" said Mellissa, "You better tell Romeo to give you 30minutes, you two have all the time in the world to go kill all the whales in the South China sea, once we are done!"

"Mellissa?" said Laura, "Don't be a pain in the butt!"

"I am so sorry," Candy replied as she looked at Laura, "give me a minute gals, please?"

Laura nodded as a signalled expression.

"Thank you! Love you all," Candy smiled.

"Spoiler alert!" Laura pitched as she held the hands of her curious friend, "We're going to witness it, CC!"

"Witness what?" asked Candy.

"Laura, seriously?" yelled Mellissa, "Come on!"

"What are you talking about?" Candy asked.

"Go finish with Romeo, I'll tell you when you get back!" answered Mellissa, she turned and stared at Laura.

Candy shook her head and as she turned to go, she was stunned to see Jake on his knees right behind her, holding a priceless ring, and looking a bit nervous!

Jake smiled looking up into her heavenly eyes, "Candy Cuthway, my ace...I know I'm not the wealthiest man in the world, nor am I the strongest, the flyest nor the toughest...but I do know one thing; I cannot live without you and I find myself falling in love with you every day that passes by and...I just want you to know that I would love to spend the rest of my life with you. Candy Cuthway, will you marry me?"

The silence of the room was deafening.

"Jake," said Candy as she looked around and saw all eyes on them in the cafe, with all the people smiling and staring, including her prideful friends, "Yes! Yes! I will marry you!"

"Oh my God!" said Jake.

"Get up!" she commanded with a blissful smile.

Mellissa and Laura's actions were worthy of paparazzi as they took series of shots of their excited friend with their phones.

"Girls!?" yelled an embarrassed Candy.

"I was there!" said Laura, tongue in cheek.

"Me too!" said Mellissa.

"Me three!" said someone in the cafe as Jake, Mellissa and Laura laughed.

Jake stood to his feet and once again kissed Candy, his most possessed prize and as everyone applauded and whistled, Jake put the ring on her finger.

"Wrong finger baby!" whispered Candy.

"Oh, sorry!" he responded as he put the ring on her itchy finger, where she pointed.

Candy hugged and kissed him then turned and flashed the ring at her friends, and the people in the cafe excitedly. "Ladies and gentlemen, I got him!" she said as they all happily laughed along with her.

Candy turned to Jake, "So this was your plan all along?"

"They offered to help!" he said as he bit his lower lip.

"You set me up! You're gonna have to buy me a drink!" she teased.

"Anything for you baby, anything," he held her hand and led her back to the counter as some of the customers congratulated them.

Jake sat on the stool by the wine counter as Candy wrapped her arms around him.

"I'm kind of nervous!" she whispered to his ears, "baby I am not dreaming, am I?"

"We're going to be fine, baby!" he assured her. He placed their order, then turned to her, "I just couldn't wait to come back, love!"

"Aww! Well, I'm here baby, what now?" teased Candy, "wait, I know! Selfie!" she buried herself into his arms, raised her phone with her right hand. She took two Selfie shots at the same time flashing her sparkling ring at the camera, "Now let's see..." she scrolled through her phone gallery, "Urgh!" she snorted, "How about a smile for a change baby, why the long face?" Candy emphasised, turning and facing the entrance to the cafe, she raised the phone again, this time at a ninety degrees angle, "Okay baby, smile!"

"Your friends are looking at us, you know!" he whispered as he gently placed his head on her right shoulder.

"Say cheese!" said Candy. They posed, as she placed her red lips on his cheek and was about to take a snapshot when suddenly a stray bullet shattered her phone and pieced through Jake's skull; his head hitting the counter as his lifeless body fell to the floor,

Candy quickly ducked and fell along as bullets shattered the counter.

"Oh my God!" screamed her friends across from under the table as the hail of bullets continued to fly.

Candy turned in shocking dismay to realize the motionless corpse of her precious Jake; the bullet had gone through the socket of his right eye.

Jake was dead.

"Baby? Noooo!" She screamed endlessly as the bullets kept pouring in. She had no choice but to quickly crawl her way to a safer position and hid under a perforated table, Candy watched as three threatening men in dark trench coats crouched in shooting back at some cars outside the cafe. Horrible was this Drive-by-Shooting as something out of a thriller. The chubby of the trigger happy men hid behind an asbestos pillar as the other two laid flat behind a table.

"Where's Pago!?" shouted the chubby one, "Pago!"

"I think he got hit, boss!" responded one of the men.

More shots were fired from outside as the petrified customers continued to scream. The three men fired back with every chance they got, bullets ricocheted from within and outside the cafe, hitting bystanders as well as waiters and waitresses in the cafe, turning it into a dead pool. As the shooting continued, the sound of sirens were heard approaching. The shooters from outside then zoomed off immediately. The three men noticing the stern possibility of being outgunned ran out firing shots at possible pursuers only to be ambushed by the police resulting to a retreat back into the cafe.

"What now, boss?" asked one of the men.

"Grab that one, the brunet in red," ordered the chubby gangster, "she's our ticket out of here and for God's sake shoot the damn lights!"

Instantly one of the men fired shots at the chandelier, the cafe's major source of illumination, giving the other the chance to grab hold of Candy.

"No! Please don't!" Candy cried out in plea.

"Get up you broad! Play it nice and simple, and you could get out of this alive!" said the henchman as he grabbed her by her hair. Candy had to hold it together, for she knew she represented the strong of the bunch.

The henchman handed her to the chubby gangster who without hesitation placed a gun behind her head, the hot tip of the pistol pressing against her delicate skull as they walked out of the cafe. Mellissa and Laura could not help but watch in horror as Candy was being used as a hostage likened to a human shield. Candy looked around and saw that Jake was not the only victim, for many of the customers were slaughtered in the crossfire.

"Freeze!" said one of the policemen.

"We don't want any trouble officers!" yelled the chubby gang leader, "We just want to get home to our families, just like you, and I believe so does this young woman, do you disagree, Red?" as he pulled Candy's hair harder. She lost a couple of strands.

"Drop your weapon!" said the police again.

"Officers, come on, haven't any of you heard of a Mexican standoff?" mocked the joking gang leader. "Red, I asked you a question;" as he licked her face with his slimy tongue, "do you disagree?"

"No!" Candy said crying, "Please don't hurt me!"

"We won't hurt you sweetheart," replied one of the henchmen, "if anything happens to you, blame it on these pigs, not us!"

"Check if he's okay!" the gang leader said pointing to the body of one of his comrades lying on the floor.

"He's dead, boss!" confirmed one of his surviving henchmen.

"Let's go!" the gang boss said, placing the cold steal of his pistol on her throat, "Do you have car? Where's your car?" he shouted at

the petrified Candy as the approaching police officers held firmly their weapons as they waited the slightest provocation.

"Ov...over there!" she cried in stammer, "the red minivan!"

"Where are the keys?" he asked with insistence.

"In my purse, back in the cafe!" she answered.

"I presumed that would be the red purse lying on the floor?" he said.

Candy nodded.

"Get to it, Chuno!" ordering the second henchman as he turned to the police, "Officers! Like I said, we just wanna get home to our fams..."

The streets were filled with the bedazzlement of onlookers as a red coloured Razor-X90 minivan zoomed and scratched through the streets in a hail of gun fires and a bound prayerful Candy in the back seat.

"Get us off their sight, Chuno!" the raging gang leader ordered.

The driver hitting the gas pedal and zooming from the authorities, manoeuvred his way through the narrow streets as the neighbourhood police kept pursued.

The sneer and stench of corroded tires filled the entire streets, leaving nothing but black smoke and tire marks.

The chubby gangster looked back as the pursuing police were closing in on their trail, "They're coming, don't let'm catch us!" Noticing they were safe beyond the reach of the authorities, the gang leader strapped himself as he relieved Candy of her perilous situation, "Wear your seatbelts, Red!" Tucking his, as they awaited losing the fast trailing authorities. However, their manoeuvre invited many other police vehicles who joined the chase. It didn't take long for the gangsters to lose the police.

After a few minutes into the bushes, the chubby gangster asked Chuno to stop, he then turned to Candy, "I've gotta go home with one of you, Red; is it going to be you or the car? What's it gonna be, Red?"

The two gangsters laughed.

"Please don't kill me," She answered crying with a trembling voice.

"Oh, you so much remind me of my sister, I ain't gonna kill you, Red," he said mimicking her voice, laughing, he leaned towards her. She screamed and started to beg him thinking he wanted to harm her but instead, he opened the door on her side, then used his leg and pushed her out cruelly. As soon as Candy landed on the ground, the men took off.

"Say me hi to granny okay, Red? Tell her the big wolf says he's coming for dinner!" the chubby gang leader echoed.

Candy stood up with tears in her eyes, she watched as Chuno threw her CDs out of the window. She ignored them and looked around to see if she knew where she was, and before she could do anything she saw the reverse light of her car came on from a distance; the gangsters were coming back to her, she then began to run into the bushes but the men got to her before she could get anywhere. Candy fell as she struggled to run with her broken high hills, screaming for help.

The other gangster got out of the car, and chased her, Candy got rid of her shoes and continued to run through the bushes. She missed her step and landed on the ground. Candy's entire face sunk into a dung, she got to her feet and tried to run but rolled down hill hitting a tree, by the time she got up the gangster had reached her, he hit her on the head and she fainted.

The gangster lifted Candy on his shoulders, walked up back to the car then squeezed her into the trunk of her own car, he then shut it.

She gained consciousness and was terrified when she realized she was in the trunk of her own minivan, she began to scream crying for help, it didn't take too long to figure out she was wasting her time so she kept quiet and sobbed as the car galloped to an unknown destination. The car got to a smoother road, and she was able to eavesdrop on their conversation.

"I'm going to get Tailor for this, I ain't letting this one slide!" said the gang leader, "If he thinks he's got ambition, so do I!"

"I'll call my brother Foreno to storm in tomorrow," said Chuno, "we shouldn't let it cool, boss. We must strike as soon as possible."

"Tailor's trying to nail me on the wall," raged the chubby gangster, "in my own damn town? Well, I'll storm his city like a voracious storm!"

"Boss, what are we going to do with, Red?" asked Chuno.

"Like I said boys, I'm going to need something to steam off!" responded the gang leader, "T.B just tongue-kissed a viper!"

The car kept moving as the gangsters continued to talk, Candy had no idea what or who Tailor was, but she understood that it was probably the name of the person who ordered the hit on the gangsters and they seemed pissed about it. After a long ride, the car went to a halt; she heard the sound of gates being opened then the car moved in and went to a halt again. Candy heard footsteps as the men mumbled, she luckily got her hand on a big spanner and managed to hold it tight waiting for the first person that would open the trunk. As soon as the trunk came open, Candy quickly pushed herself out like a little beast to attack her kidnappers but was welcomed by six wild police dogs barking at her, the dogs surrounded her angrily barking, growling and drooling as they sighted her, Candy threw the spanner away and ran back into the trunk as fast as she could and was about closing it on herself when the chubby gangster whistled the dogs; they all went calm and silent. He whistled again and they walked back and away from the car. She saw two huge guards at the entrance gate who looked rather unfriendly, the dogs ran to the other side of the building and that was when she sighted the big white house.

The chubby gangster walked into the big white house. The other two walked to Candy, grabbed her and forced her into the house. It was a beautiful place, but not the kind of place a woman

in her state should be treated in such a way on a first visit. She had no idea what they were planning to do to her.

Such great display of wealth, as she was being forced through the big house, Candy was trying to see if she recognised any of the three men but she really could not put things together, she also observed that the two gangsters had a pistol each on the waist. Candy got dragged helplessly through the stairs. As they moved her up she noticed some ladies who seemed too drunk; the ladies were all in a room filled with smoke, and most of them too high to even know what was going on, junkies to the core. Some of the drunk ladies rushed to welcome the chubby gangster and began to kiss and touch him but he pushed them away and made his way into the master's bedroom.

"Lay her over there" he said, pointing his finger at the sculptured king sized bed in the middle of the room.

Both henchmen dragged Candy to the bed as the chubby gangster undressed himself; he unbuckled his shoes and threw them flying into the room like a kid who just got back from school.

"They say when Tailor's fangs go deep in your flesh, there's no antidote! Well, I'll give him a taste of his own medicine, believe that." said the chubby gang leader, "Have her ready boys!" as he pulled his holster and gently lay it next to his trousers on the floor, then rushed into the bathroom doing the moon walk in a ridiculous way.

The two men forced Candy on the big bed, they took turns in hitting her, as she tried to resist. She was terrified as they touched her in all the wrong places as they continually made jest of their 'prize.'

"Get the rope," said Chuno as the other henchman left, "I told you if you play nice and simple, you'd get out of this alive. I'm dropping off your corpse down the river once he's done with you..." he whispered, "after all, you wouldn't want to return damaged goods!"

Candy cried and begged for her life, but she knew two renowned facts; no one needed to tell her that her tears would not pay the way out of her ordeal, and she knew that to escape her ordeal she must cross the line that the men would not be willing to.

Candy reached for her ribbon, a gift from her mother from years back, it was a beautiful ceramic red six-inched sharp and pointy ribbon made in china which she wore that day, and without any hesitation she kicked one of the men and buried half of the ribbon into Chuno's throat, as he grabbed his neck bleeding to death, she reached for his pistol, cocked it and fired a shot at the other henchman and missed. Candy fired a second shot but the gun jammed, she then flung the pistol at him and tried to run out of the bedroom, the gangster used his leg to block her; she stumbled and fell on the floor, the man walked to her and slapped her, he kicked her again and pushed her off as he went looking for his own pistol. Candy sighted the chubby gang leader's gun on the floor next to his trousers, she quickly stretched for it, cocked it and by the time the henchman turned to face her, he got kissed by a hot smooth bullet through the eyes.

Candy knew the chubby gang leader would come out any time soon, she remained in her position on the floor, turned the gun and aimed at the bathroom door patiently with shaky hands waiting for him as she panted.

The fresh cut wound on the side of her right eye began to bleed, the blood ran into her eyes but she did not blink as she panted heavily, the chubby gang leader came running with his pot belly, "Chuno what the hell, man?" he said as a bullet cut the artery on the left side of his neck, Candy aimed for his throat but she missed it. She fired again as he fell on his back on the bathroom floor, and managed to crouch back into the bathroom moaning while cursing and calling her names.

The main door to the bedroom came crashing, the two huge guards came in but they too got a taste of her wrath; a clean headshot sent their lifeless bodies down the floor.

The chubby gang leader got to the toilet seat, looked at the blood in his hand, then quickly placed his hand back to cover his neck; applying pressure to stop the excessive bleeding, he was losing his vision but he sighted the nuzzle of his pistol, "That-belongs-to-me, you whore!" he said as he shut and opened his eyes like a drunk fool.

"Who's the Tailor?" asked Candy.

"Tailor?" said the chubby gang leader as he gasped for air, "who the hell is Tailor? You're screwed, I've got CCTV cams all round, you're done with, slut!" he added as he spat out blood, "I'm going to get you, and everybody you've ever loved. My men will get you!" he took his hand off his neck and took a good look at it again, placed it back as he coughed out blood.

Candy walked closed to him as she lowered the gun.

The chubby gang leader cunningly laid his right hand on the floor and began to gently move it under the toilet seat while throwing curses at Candy, she watched him carefully when all of a sudden; she fired a shot to his chest.

Candy went back into the bedroom and checked the first gangster she attacked to make sure he was dead. As soon as she confirmed they were all dead, she ran downstairs. Still, none of the ladies she saw even minded or cared, neither did they even sense something was going on in the big house. They were just moving around the house like zombies with funny hairdo, all drugged up and some of them high like chameleons on steroids. Candy carefully searched and luckily located a big garage; many exotic classic cars and some Japanese Power Bike-Motorcycles were parked. She sighted a white SUV with the key still in the ignition, Candy entered the vehicle and as she was about zooming off, she saw something that looked like an RT-W 242 B fuel dispenser, Candy stopped and checked to be sure her eyes weren't lying, she got out of the vehicle and rushed to the dispenser; she pulled the pump handle, then unleashed the fuel as she pulled the lever. Candy threw the pump on the ground as fuel gushed through the

nozzle. She ran back into the house, located the zombie-looking ladies' lair and picked a lighter next to an ashtray, the ashtray laid like a ship on top of white powder on a table, she coughed as she fired some shots in the air telling them the police have surrounded the house, and without further ado, the ladies all started running out of the house screaming, not over the sound of the gun but for the simple fact that Candy mentioned the word 'police'.

Candy got into the SUV, lit the lighter and flung it through the car window, before it landed on the floor of the garage, she had crashed through the garage doors. The dogs gave way as she smashed the gates, both the dogs and the zombie-looking ladies ran out of the compound as the big white house exploded. Candy watched it from the rear view mirror as the house burst into flames, the road led downhill, and she could see the town lights as she rolled down. The sight gave her a relief as she hit the gas pedal strapping the seatbelt on.

The SUV was found burnt few miles away from the town the next morning, and the gangster's den all burnt to ashes. The press took its bite and reported it as gang related. The authorities did not care to give it much attention, because someone helped made their job easier by taking the gangsters out. However, they had to pull up some stunts and act as though they would run a thorough investigation on what went down at the gangster's den.

Candy had reported herself at the nearest police station. When asked whether she was harmed in any way by the gangsters she remained silent, and when asked if she was aware of what went down at the house, she fabricated a story. Candy claimed that she was blindfolded and taken to the house, locked in one of the rooms, which she later started to hear exchange of gun shots in the house then managed to escape via the bathroom window, sustaining some minor injuries. Her story was taken into account and of course, under the circumstance, no one doubted her. She told the authorities that she did not have the chance to see who attacked the den and acted traumatised by the incident. Candy

cried during the interview when the pressmen repeatedly asked her about the experience. She only painted a faint picture of what she claimed she saw and denied knowing or recognising any of the men who kidnapped her.

Candy's father, Lawrence stood by her during her interview with the press. He had been at the police station the night she was kidnapped. He was in his mid-sixties; grey haired with white moustache and beard, an average body seize but well-structured for a man his age, a retired officer who served in the army. He was a very serious looking man who kept a straight face throughout the session his daughter had with the press. When the press asked if he had anything to say about his daughter's safe return, he replied, "No comment!" a man of few words he was.

On reaching home, Candy silently got out of the vehicle and walked straight to her room as her father followed her behind. He met her lying on the bed crying. He sat next to her, gently tapped her on the back as she sobbed. He stretched his hand and picked a framed picture of her mother kept beside her bed and then placed it back. Mrs Cuthway passed away years back, she died of cancer and they had a good life together until her demise.

"You remind me so much of your mother, how I've missed her. Better where she is now than this vicious world." said her father, "would you like some time alone, honey?"

Candy quietly got up off her bed and walked to her wardrobe, she picked a small box filled with pictures, sat back on the bed next to her dad, "He proposed to me daddy," she said as tears rolled down her cheeks, "just before he got killed!"

Her dad hugged her as she drenched his shirt with her tears. While his mind wandered over the time his daughter was a little girl, when he was her only superhero, he just didn't know the best way to comfort his once little and cuddly sweetheart; he knew that in the eyes of his princess, his cape had flown along with age, "It'll be alright, honey," he said, "Everything's going to be alright!"

Along Came Tailor

Candy had moved to Deophilis, the beach city. She had gotten a new job that paid her less of what she earned with her former employer. It has been a year and eleven months, since the incident occurred. Jake was laid to rest about a week after what happened that frightful evening, Candy and her friends attended the funeral along with her father. The burial made her accept the realisation of the loss she had to bear. As painful as it seemed, she knew she had to move on with her life. Her two friends, Mellissa and Laura stood by her side and comforted her in the ways they could, it was sad for them to have witnessed it all but happier to have seen her gradually returned to her once blissful Candy; for society makes loss more bearable for the unmarried which was convenient for Candy as she occupied her mind with series of distractions, making her visit to the *Vida futura* private art gallery, a frequent practice. One of the preoccupations she had to endure as she awaited what was next in life for her.

In the art gallery, a smiling female art promoter walked on to a distinguished gentleman, "Sir, would you need that wrapped?" referring to the *Vicasio* painting he has been staring for the past half hour speechless.

"It's amazing what you can do with a little smudge of red," referring to the painting.

The lady smiled and said, "It is the battle of *Noche;* a thousand soldiers were wiped that day, not many appreciate the sights of violence."

"Mmm!" The man turned to her, "I am not many!"

"I shall be over there, if you need anything!" she responded, he glanced at her as she walked away. Making him spot a beautiful

broad, whose appreciation of art picked his interest. Her dress was perfect; his favourite colour. She was everything he believed a woman should be. *Such beauty in red needed a complement* he thought, as he walked to the mysterious woman. Her perfume was what he had always appreciated in a woman.

It was Candy Cuthway. She stood facing an abstract painting, pretending to be intrigued, as though she was captivated by it. Candy sighed and smiled as she tried to wrap her sense around its meaning.

"Touzhius Alejandre's 'Scent of the Son,'" said the gentleman.

"It's not!" Candy seductively turned to him and said, "It's only a replica, one of many used to stand in for the original, which was damaged in 1981 during the Northberg uprising."

"I've never seen an art critic with such charm," he said, "a beautiful lady with taste and flare in art?"

"I'm flattered, Mister..." she responded

"Burdigan, Tailor Burdigan!" he replied.

"It's a pleasure meeting you, Tailor Burdigan." she said, "I've fed my senses enough for the day. Please to meet you." she smiled as she made an attempt to leave.

"Maybe I should give you a lift?" he said

"You are too kind sir," She responded, "I will take the bus."

"A woman such as you should not be seen wandering off alone without some form of security." Tailor said.

Playing into his ego, Candy stopped and responded, "A man as imposing as you shouldn't be seen with too many."

Tailor smiled and laughed, captivated by her charm, "A beautiful art critic and also with a sense of humour? I like that!"

"This is an art gallery sir, everything here is beautiful, even if it's not worth the price." Candy replied.

"A woman as intriguing as you, is worth any price!' he said.

"That isn't very complementing for one who has a poor judgment in discerning authenticity!" Candy said, "I'm not on display, am I?"

Tailor paused and smiled, concluding that she had succeeded in picking his interest he said, "You're right sweet lady, about the fake painting of Touzhius Alejandre. He called it, 'Scent of the Son,' it was actually destroyed during the 1981 Northberg uprising. This painting was supposed to be one of his peachiest achievements. It portrays the greatest weapon mankind would ever possess; the painting is a depiction of a peculiar name that is hateable yet, greatly feared by Satan and all those who dwell in the dark. This piece was however, sold at the black market by a certain collector...me!"

"My apologies Mr Burdigan, I too have my follies!" she said, "No collector however rich would bedazzled himself for such a work unless he had an obsession with the artist in question."

"Follies? No!" replied Tailor, "In my sight, a woman as beautiful as you would get away with anything," smiling in his upscale look as he removed his *Santos De Cartier* golden sunglasses to have a good look at her eyes.

Candy smiled turning away from his gaze.

Tailor smiled too as he wore his eyeglasses back and said, "He was such a religious man, a sculptor and a musician...but his life was short-lived, everyone who knew him spoke highly of him."

"So um...you know him that well?" asked Candy.

"Well, yeah, sort of!" said Tailor as he used his right hand to adjust the painting on the wall, "I admire his works, unfortunately I've never met him. They say the good die young, he was one of a few."

"Mmm! He must've been great of a man then!" said Candy.

"I'd trade half of what I own," added Tailor, "just to have him paint one last piece for me!"

"Wow, some fan you are," Candy said.

"I couldn't but notice," said Tailor, "you've been staring at the painting for quite some time."

"Well, I've seen almost half of the works on display today but this particular one exalts my imagination," relied Candy, "and what would you have him paint? If I may ask?"

"Well, if you had asked me this question say, yesterday," he said confidently, "I'd say maybe a painting of a rusted nail being hammered into the right hand of Christ, or maybe uh...a portrait of mother Theresa dining with Diana and the poor children of Africa under a dead baobab tree!" Tailor sighed, "But now that yesterday is buried in its fated tomb, I would ask him to paint the most beautiful thing I've ever set my eyes on!" he walked and stood beside Candy.

Their eyes all set on the painting.

"And what's that?" Candy whispered.

"You have the most gorgeous eyes I've ever seen," he said turning to her, "Your smile can make a captain throw his own heart into the furnace just so he could power his ship to get to you on the shore."

Candy sighed, "Such flattery!"

Tailor smiled and stretched his hand, "She knows my name...and the beautiful lady most be?"

"Candy Cuthway!" she replied smiling, Candy turned to him and innocently stretched her right hand.

"Hello, Candy Cuthway," Tailor said as he held her hand, "the warmth of your hand can melt the hearts of kings," he bent and gently kissed the back of her hand, "alluring, you smell just like the heavens. You dress and smell just as how a woman should!"

Candy felt abashed, "People are watching us," she whispered.

"They can watch all they want!" responded Tailor, "Such delicate hand. I bet if this was ancient times, you'd be a princess, and I, that young man who would sit and watch your beautiful smile until the sun sets!"

"I would've been the daughter of a peasant farmer! Trust me," she responded with a giggle, "I know what I am talking about!"

"It'll still fall in tune then; and the prince would leave his people and all the spoils in the castle just so he'd be with you," said Tailor, "if his father the king disagreed with whom his heart is fond of, that is. Trust me, if I was a king who has lost both his crown and his kingdom, the sight and smell of you would make me know there are things worth more than a golden chair and a land filled with people whose duty is to execute my bidding!"

"You have a way with words, Mister Tailor!" Candy said as she gently withdrew her hand, "You sound like a writer. What more can you tell me about this...painter?"

"Oh Well, like I said," he sighed, "Touzhius Alejandre was a very religious man who believed that the only way man would experience an everlasting peace is when man acknowledges, embraces and becomes one with the light,"

"I see, you know him that much?" Candy inquired.

"Yeah, I was lucky to have bought one of his diary during an auction some years back after a ferocious bidding battle," responded Tailor, "it's one of my most precious possessions! I guard it more than I guard my own soul. Touzhius Alejandre described his experience when something mysterious happened to him a certain night; he found himself in this amazing place, and he was made to see the great wonders of the presence of the one he called the light. He gave an account of how he saw these myriad souls all dressed in white, crowned with gold and in such great glory as they surrounded and gave praise to this awesome light that seemed to be seated at the centre, on the most magnificent throne. Touzhius Alejandre recounted how he saw praises sang from the tongues of these righteous men elevated as the sweetest fruit offered to the light, and how, the light emits itself in return as a reward and shone upon and through these pure souls, thereby completing a perfect circle of peace and harmony. He said that when he found himself in that place, it was so amazing and awesome that he knelt down and bowed before the light. The very birthplace of love itself."

Candy watched him expressed in details as though he was right there when Touzhius Alejandre had his encounter.

"Hmm! Fascinating," said Candy.

"He stated that after his encounter with the light, he came to the realisation that God and man have the most perfect and peaceful relationship; for in that union, man finds peace through love, and thereby Touzhius Alejandre came to the conclusion that man was created to praise the creator. So, in a way you can say; man is an embodiment of praise while God, the light is an embodiment of abundant love, truth and infinite mercy. So, when man gives himself in form of praise to God, then man shall receive pure love and abundant mercy in return. Which leaves man totally immersed in an aeonian ocean of peace. The very thing man's spirit was created to feed upon; peace, such that he had never experienced," Tailor smiled, "Touzhius Alejandre stated that, a man, whether rich or poor can never understand his purpose nor experience true peace until he seeks, acknowledges and embraces the light! Because purpose in itself was designed and gifted to man and so a man can only attain to his full potential when the one who created him unlocks it! And as long as a man does not align himself with his creator, the light-God, man will forever feel empty no matter what he earn, own or become!"

"Wow! Breath-taking! Nothing new about that," said Candy, "if you ask me, hope I don't sound rude."

"No, not at all. You have no idea the kind of man he was before his encounter with the light!" said tailor, "However, one of the problems I have with Touzhius Alejandre is that he believed that Jesus is like this prince who inherited a great kingdom from his father, the king. And he, Jesus...the prince, is on a mission to reconcile his father the king with the love of his life; man. I think Touzhius Alejandre conceived this half-baked idea that the new heaven is like God's beautiful resting place, where God and man would remain as one in perfect harmony forever, and ever! In a way, man shall reclaim his rightful place in the sight of God! Of

course just like any typical follower of Christ's footsteps, Touzhius claimed that he was made to understand that Christ created a path from a dying world to a living world and that Christ, himself is that path!"

"Oh wow, deep...you are a preacher now?" she teased, "Are you a Christian now?"

"Do you know my problem with the Christians?" replied Tailor, They claimed the world isn't their home that they're just passing through. But if you wanna be like Christ, aren't you supposed to make sure you shine the light in order to lead whom you love, back home?" he smirked, "I mean if you claim you love someone, that's what you should do, right? You know, lead the ones you found in that market that appear lost or strayed, simple!" Tailor pulled his eyeglasses and used a white hanky to clean the lenses, "If I go about building dwellings out of rocks in a place where even the buyers and sellers raise only temporary tents, then I should be assumed to be a citizen of such a place!"

"That's a bit judgmental, don't you think? Are you trying to avoid my question? Sermoniser?" asked Candy, "Are-you-a-Christian?" she emphasised, "It's just a simple question!"

"I can't be that, no I am not!" he replied, "Christianity is a huge supererogatory task; great and unnecessary burden, I mean, come on...look at the author of that faith and what he went through! You should know that whoever wants to follow the footsteps of such a wonderful man, as the stories painted him, should as well be ready to do as the man did or more and...probably face what he has been through or worse. That's not a route I would like to find my footprints on, believe that!?"

"I think you're going to be an amazing preacher," Candy joked, "it's good to know you didn't deny His existence."

"Well, even when Satan approaches a man, one of the first things he would say is that, God is not good." said Tailor, "Which means, the first thing the devil himself does is to acknowledge the existence and the authority of God! Now that's the kind of being

you should call a preacher," he sighed, "In order words, only a fool would believe there is no God, right? And some, even believe that the creatures with other tangible and visible entities should be worshipped and feared, but not the creator?"

"So, not religious and obviously not atheistic either." Candy said, "There's a word crafted for people like you, you know!"

"My mother was a Christian, before she passed away," said Tailor, "but I highly doubt if she understood what it really meant to be one!" Nevertheless, they say in death, all life questions are answered!"

"So, you do not have any beliefs, or whatsoever?" Candy asked again.

"No, no darling I'm just a free...business man." answered Tailor, "You don't just believe in something simply because you read it or when someone tells you, you believe what you know!" he smiled, "Touzhius Alejandre wandered the earth as an empty vessel. He said, a man shouldn't just believe in some supernatural being whose existence can only be found behind the tongues of men or on the pages of some books. Touzhius Alejandre sailed on the seas of such thoughts until one night, the devil came to him and made him an offer no man would refused; Satan offered him the world and also promised to reveal to him many secrets in exchange for his soul. Touzhius Alejandre wrote, 'I came to the realisation that no one needed to tell me that my soul is worth more than any treasure the devil was willing to offer'. Touzhius Alejandre went through an ordeal that totally changed him, and stumbled on something nobody could ever take away from him when he final had an encounter with the light, in it, he said he found the truth about everything."

"You don't sound like someone who is interested in Touzhius Alejandre's works," said Candy, "But it's like you..."

"You know, someone once told me that everything a man owns and or possesses in this world can be seized from him, but not his knowledge." Tailor interjected, "However, for the knowledge to be

accepted by such a man, its genuineness can only be authenticated when the conveyer of such knowledge itself is that knowledge!"

"In other words..." Candy responded.

"A man has every right to disagree with everything he is told by anyone, it's absolutely okay not to swallow the things one is being fed with from any of these so-called holy books, until..." said Tailor.

"...he encounters the truth," Candy added, "and the truth shall set him free!"

"Seek and ye shall find!" added Tailor.

"Hmm! We're going somewhere," Candy interpose saying, "And I believe Thoziuz Alendray..."

"It's Touzhius Alejandre; T-O-U-Z-H-I-U-S space A-L-E-J-A-N-D-R-E."

"Oh! Well, I believe Touzhius Alejandre, found something he longed sought for," responded Candy, "no man had ever found what he sought not!"

"Exactly!" he said, "Your allurement carries with it a rare spice found in beautiful women."

"Here we go again," she said, "and what's that?"

"Intelligence!" answered Tailor in a soft voice, "You see, I'm only quoting some of things the great painter said. He didn't hide anything about himself in that diary; his love life and what it almost cost him, his encounter with the dark lord and how he got saved by the light as he walked through the pectus of hell." Tailor stared into her pretty eyes, "Listen uh...I know a good restaurant by the beach, in case you want to..."

"Interesting story, Sir." said Candy, "I really wish I could come but I've got to get back to the office."

"Please call me Tailor." he said, "Come on, your boss will understand. Well, to be frank if I was him I would get mad and probably sack you...then marry you!"

"What?" Candy exclaimed.

"Oh nothing!" replied Tailor.

"I really wish I could, but you see, I am like this ship that stole away in the darkness!" she interposed, "Trust me, if I'm three seconds late, my boss would notice! I just came by to see what's up and what's new then rush back, you know."

"Well, how about this evening, dinner?" he asked.

"I need tonight to put some things in place, because I just recently moved in to my new place." she said staring at her wristwatch, "Plus, I really kind of need that job, you know how hard things are nowadays."

"A beautiful queen like yourself should not be exposed to such chores," he said, "you should be bathed in gold, fly around the world in your own jet, lay this beautiful head on a pillow stuffed with red diamonds."

"Bathed in gold?" Candy laughed, "Fly around the world in my own jet, you say?" she covered her mouth with her right hand when she realised the sound of her laughter drew the attention of the rest of the people in the gallery, "and that thing you said about red diamonds, stuffed in my pillow? Oh, come on, I'm not a 16year old girl, get real!"

"Well, the good thing is, I did make you laugh, didn't I?" he said smiling.

"I've got to admit, yes you did!" Candy said as she smiled back, "And I'm glad you did!"

"There are men who can make that happen." said Tailor, "Any man who understands the value of having two hands can get you all the things you need."

Tailor was lost in her arresting eyes, as though they commanded his heartbeat. He was totally ensnared by her beauty but Candy insisted she needed to go.

"Sir, sorry to interrupt," said the female art promoter as she broke the silence, "I don't know if you'd fancy our little treat. It's complementary." A young man in a black tuxedo was standing beside her, holding a Bottle Bouquet Wine Glass Tray.

"Oh, thank you." Tailor responded as he picked two glasses of wine and handed one to Candy. He turned to the other lady and said, "About that *Vicasio* piece, please give me a minute."

"I've got less than fifteen minutes to get back to the office," said Candy.

"Oh, no!" said Tailor, "In that case, I'll need your address, I would like to send you a telegram!"

"Really?" Candy laughed, as she returned the wineglass to him.

Tailor laughed along, "Apparently, a phone number would do?"

"Is this how you talk to every woman you come across?" she teased.

"If her presence births an ambiance that sweeps a king off his feet, yes!" replied Tailor with a charming smile.

Candy looked at him in the eyes, "Well, I'm out of words!" she pulled out a piece of paper from her purse and scrawled her number then handed it over to him.

"I just hope I'm not dreaming," Tailor said, "and if I am, I pray nobody wakes me up because I'm going to commit murder!"

Tailor was so excited he couldn't hide it. As Candy walked out of the gallery, he couldn't believe what beheld his eyesight; her curves and the way she walked hypnotised him. He took a few steps towards his bodyguards."I am going to marry that girl, mark my words boys," he said to them, "yes!" as he set his left knee on the floor excitedly like a child.

"Anything boss wants boss gets," said one of the bodyguards.

"No Gerald. This one, T.B must be patient with." Tailor responded, "This is the type of woman you wanna call a wife; squeeze and pour her all the love you've got locked inside of you." he turned and walked back to the painting on the wall, where the female art promoter was standing, "Uh huh! So, what plans do you have for the evening?" as he wrapped his arm around her waist.

Candy knew he would come for the exhibition; she had taken her time and made little findings about Tailor and had dug enough

she needed; from his lifestyle, both his legitimate and fraudulent business down to his favourite colour which was exactly what she wore to the exhibition. She practically knew him one on one in her mind, and was lucky he showed up after several attempts she made to have him notice her.

Tailor was known to be a very successful business man, a well-known admired man in the beach city. He considered himself a drawstring bag filled with fortune, and nobody really knew how he got to rise to power. However, as legit as he might have appeared, rumours had it that he was a drug baron known by the Feds but in a way, he played to the tune of the ones upstairs. Tailor also had so many friends in high places, and was well connected and covered by the corrupt cops. He was the perfect definition of a philanthropist on the surface but, Just like any other wealthy man, Tailor wanted more of one thing; power, he even had dreams of going into politics and running for president in the near future.

With what Candy had gathered about Tailor, she must try hard to look beyond the way he presents his image in order to have him bite the bait, for he is believed to be as vicious and deadly as a school of piranhas. And because Tailor's records with the law appeared crystal and stainless, it would be a waste of time taking him to court in connection with Jake's murder. Besides, Candy had stamped out all the witnesses that could testify against him.

Deep Down Under

Tailor Burdigan tried as much as he could to see Candy in the days that followed, she turned him down several times using one excuse or the other; after numerous calls, text messages and a bit of persuasion, Candy agreed to go out on a date with him.

A black limousine was parked in front of the house, Tailor arrived around 7:30pm to pick her up; about three hours before he arrived he had already mailed a dress to her address. Candy looked elegant in it and as she walked down to the limo, his attention was on the smile she wore than the dress she had on. She mesmerised him with her looks and he just could not but expressed how he felt seeing her, both in his words and actions.

They left with two of his bodyguards in front. The cork of the champagne bottle popped.

"I've always wanted to do that!" he said, "Some say it's the evidence of good living, but I say good health is all one needs to be called a wealthy fellow!"

The classic interior of the limo was something Candy had never seen before and they both seemed to be very excited. Candy sipped the wine leaving her red lipstick on the glass, she appeared too modest in his eyes; not like the rest of the girls who paraded themselves around him because of his wealth, and he liked the fact that she did not see him the way the rest did, well, that's what he thought.

"I felt like the restless sea, just couldn't wait to see you again!" said Tailor, "So, how has work been?"

"Just cool, a bit hectic though," she replied, "You know...usual hassle!"

"What's your favourite colour? Just curious," he asked.

"Of all the things you would ask me," she laughed, "why don't we talk about that some other time," as she moved from the seat opposite him, "and not a damn word about Touzhius Alejandre tonight, please!" she gently rested her head on his shoulders.

"You started it!" said Tailor as they both laughed, "What is Touzhius Alejandre? Hey waiter, can I have one plate of Touzhius Alejandre and a bottle of coke?" he joked then kissed her on the forehead.

"Shut up, I'm just trying to remind you not to lift the curtains of dawn on the dusk!"

"I have no idea why I just could not take you off my mind ever since the last time I saw you," he said.

"You talked too much the other day," she jested, "I can't remember ever standing that long to listen to anybody divulge such info."

Deep inside, she just could not wait to watch him beg for his life in her hands. Candy could tell she had caught him off-guard.

They got to *La meilleure cuisines* a chic restaurant and bar with wraparound windows and striped marble floors facing the ocean, one of Tailor's favourite spots.

"It's kind of nice, too cosy!" said Candy.

"First time I came here, they didn't want to let me in because of how I looked," he whispered, "Guess who bought the building two days later?"

"You're joking!" she said, "You didn't have to take vengeance to that level, come on!"

"Sometimes...in order to succeed in certain businesses," he said, "you must feet some associates to the sharks, even your closest allies. Some folks would push your patience to its limits, and make you do things you've never imagined you could," he sighed, "especially those you call friends."

"Welcome Sir, madam," said the waiter, "is there any other thing you'd like to have before your order is made ready?"

"Order?" said Candy.

"Oh, yes! I've committed a serious crime," said Tailor, "I made an advance reservation earlier for the *Golden Opulence Sundae,* one of their best dishes. You're going to love it!"

"Oh, okay!" she said, "and this *Golden Opulence Sundae,* I hope a lady's stomached can harbour it." She laughed, "Is that what you take whenever you come here?"

"Well, yes but for today, I would also like to have a taste of Grilled Shrimp Scampi." he said, "But trust me, you'll love their *Golden Opulence Sundae!"*

"Alright," she responded, "if you say so!"

"Okay," said Tailor as he turned to the waiter, "time to make our stomach happy, young man!"

"And the wine, sir?" asked the waiter kindly.

"The usual," answered Tailor.

The waiter bowed and left.

"Hmm! Such humility!" said Candy, "So, what kind of business are you into?"

"First, you tell me what you do for a living and I, would puke out all of me in your ears!" he replied.

"That's so awful." she replied, "You don't sugar-coat things, do you? Well, okay...I was a real estate agent, but now working for a firm that supplies building materials from Asia, and you?"

"Well, I had wanted to study engineering. My own mother almost died of heart attack when she figured I preferred to hustle than go to school. It broke her heart," he said.

"No way, you did not..." she interjected.

"Yup! High school dropout!" Tailor answered, "But now, I'm into exports of virtually any good stuff this country has got to offer to the world; mostly from the farms, and also importation of the little we can devour from the shores of other nations. It's a rather dicey task but hey, a man got to do what a man got to!" he held his glass of wine and gazed at it for a while, "I just wanted to pay the small bills but now...I'm the reason thousands of men get to put food on the table!" he smiled.

It didn't take long for the waiter along with a waitress to arrive with the food, wine and cutleries. They carefully placed it on the table as Tailor and candy continued talking.

As Candy tasted a spoonful of the *Golden Opulence Sundae,* it blew the taste buds out of her mouth.

"Mmm! You've succeeded in making me never to doubt your judgment," she said, "Oh my God, this is super delicious!"

"I told you," he said, "call me maestro!" They both laughed.

Tailor didn't hesitate to tell Candy a lot about his beloved mother, she noticed that he sort of wore a polished smile whenever he mentioned his mother.

"Hmm, I guess with all the fortune now, your mother is proud of you," she said smiling at him.

"I wish it is so," said Tailor as he sipped his wine, "She passed away before I made my first thousand bucks! So, to make myself feel better, I uh..." he sighed, "I went back to school, got the certificates!"

"Wow! Isn't that adorable?" Candy said.

"Yeah! It is," he said, "I had them framed and her grave dug."

"What?" Candy responded in a low tone as she forced the liquid down her throat.

"I placed the certificates beside her...in a gold coated-coffin," he responded, "but of course I paid my way through the university!" he giggled, "Who wants to study anyway, huh? The system is ugly, so ugly the so-called educated ones work throughout their lives for the poorly educated but incredibly wealthy and extremely successful folks! You wonder which party is ignorant, huh?"

"Wow, you are a strange one, aren't you?" said Candy, "She must have mean a lot to you. What's her name, your mother?"

"Yeah, but I disappointed her in many ways," he replied, "Her name was Alethea! It's a Greek name, meaning 'Truth,'"

Candy smiled, "Look, I don't know if it's okay for me to say this but uh..."

"Please, excuse me for a minute." asked Tailor, "You don't mind, do you?"

"No, not at all!" responded Candy.

Tailor pulled out his cell phone and walked away from the table.

Candy cautiously checked around to see if anybody was watching as she dipped her fingers into her purse and pulled out a small bottle with a colourless substance in it. Her heart began to pound as she held the small bottle, she took a heavy breath, then carefully put the bottle back into her purse. Minutes later, Tailor returned.

"I think I need to cut down on the wine!" he joked as he sat down. Tailor picked his wine glass and took a sip, "You were about to say something right before I left."

Candy smiled, "Oh yeah!" she sighed, "Ever since we got here, you've been talking about your mother. I didn't hear you say a word about..."

"My Father?" Tailor interjected, "He did what most cowards do; poked an innocent girl when she was just 16 and went off the grid when she told him she was pregnant," Tailor picked the bottle of wine and emptied it in his cup, "and you won't believe who came knocking on the gates of my house years back," he stared into Candy's eyes, "but I put him back where he belonged!" Tailor called to the attention of the waitress.

"Where he belonged?" Candy asked, "Where is that?"

Tailor looked reluctant to answer her question this time around.

"I am sorry if I uh..." she responded.

"Naa, it's okay. The only place people like him belong is away from life, I mean away from my life," said Tailor.

Candy managed to change the topic of their discussion and as the waitress arrived, Candy told Tailor that it was late and she needed to get home.

"There's no need for another round of bottle," she said, "had enough wine and fun for the night."

"It's as if your presence makes me nervous," he said, "I almost ate the entire plate and virtually swigged down the wine! Could you believe that?" Tailor laughed.

"I've enjoyed my evening so much," she said, "and I'm glad I came!"

"Really?" he asked excitedly.

"Yeah!" she nodded with a beautiful smile.

Tailor entertained her with his great sense of humour and he disgorged it gladly. They had fun that night and showered themselves with as many droplets of jokes as they could. After the dinner, Tailor and Candy left the restaurant and went for a walk; they took off their shoes and stepped on the warm sandy beach that night, and the ocean osculated their feet with its fluent riches. They felt as if they had known each other for long. Tailor did not bug her with his lifestyle nor about any nontextual matter.

They continued to talk on their way back and she told him a few things he needed to know about herself.

The limo was packed in front of the house.

"So, when am I going to see you again?" Tailor asked as he walked her to the door.

"Would you like to see me again?" asked Candy.

"Sure, I'd kill or die to see you once more!" Tailor answered.

"Why? Pardon me asking?" she replied with a smile.

"Well, one; for the fact that when I look into your eyes I feel like I've got no secrets to hide anymore," he said, "I feel as though all the mystery that surrounded me is gone with the wind. I feel like you know me deep down for who I truly am!"

"I'm kind of scared hearing that, Tailor!" she said softly as she wrapped her arms around his neck, "Just call me anytime, sweetie. I really had a quality time!" she kissed him passionately.

Tailor kept his eyes shut for some seconds, "Wow!" he took a deep breath, "Wow!'

"This is the part where you open your eyes!" Candy whispered, "And say, goodnight!"

"I wish I could freeze this moment!" responded Tailor.

For a man who has got almost everything he had ever dreamed of, watching him lose his defences in the sight of a woman perplexed his bodyguards, but who were they to speak of what they've noticed.

Candy entered the house and shut the door behind her, with her back on the door, she stood there for a while and almost didn't cry but tears rolled down her cheeks as Jake's thoughts hovered around her mind.

About half an hour later that same night, her cell phone beeped, she checked it and saw an sms from Tailor, expressing how much of a wonderful evening he had and how grateful he was but the part that hitched her heart was the message he sent before she slept off; 'Candy, I'll love to celebrate you every day, I'll make the birds tell our story. Let's make the angels wish they were you and I. Candy, you make me want to become a better man...your smile would make a king's throne seem worthless without you sitting by his side. I'm falling in love with you, and I'm not afraid to say it!'

The Ring of Death

Tailor and Candy have been seeing each other for about two months before she finally agreed to go visit his place. By the time they got to the big mansion, he had all his maids lined up as he paraded her around the house.

"If there is anyone you should trust among them to always deliver, it's Catharina!" he pointed at the older looking lady in her late forties, "She started working here about seven months ago and ever since she came here, she succeeded in making me fall in love with the house, very committed and dedicated to her work!"

"Four months, sir," said Catharina.

"Oh yes, yeah! Four months. Yes true, well, I'm not giving you a raise Catharina but I assure you, I shall reward you handsomely one day!" joked Tailor, "Well, ladies and gentlemen, this is Miss Candy Cuthway, a rare gem," he smiled joyfully, "my rare gem!"

The maids smiled and curtsied when Candy shook their hands like the Queen, she couldn't help but blush at the warmth welcome she had received.

"So I would like you all to treat and show her the same respect as you have shown me," said Tailor, "I want this woman to be happy within the walls of this house no matter what it'll cost you, and I mean it!"

Candy became fond of Catharina however, she was kind to almost all the maids in the big mansion.

"You seem to trust her so much!' said Candy as they walked around the house.

"Who? Catharina?" Tailor giggled, "The rest of them have been working here for years but ever since Catharina came, she sort of

got this soft spot in my heart, in a way I cannot explain! Maybe it's because she reminds me so much of my mother!"

The maids could not help but smile as they admired Candy's outfit.

"Do you think she'll be as nice, sweet and kind as this when she finally becomes the Mrs?" whispered one of the maids.

"Well, it is not mine to bother," answered another, "I'll do that which is required of me in the house and shall retire when the time comes! Seal your lips and do the same Sarah."

"Mr Tailor had never introduced any lady to us," she said again, "and I have never seen him this...happy?"

After the introduction and the tiresome tour round, Candy passed the night at the big mansion, she chatted with Melissa and Laura online and updated them about her new man. They were happy for her.

While in the bedroom Candy noticed a beautiful painting on the wall and walked to it, "Where did you get this?" she asked.

"Oh! It's a gift from an old friend," he said as he wrapped his arms around her from behind, "it's called ''The White Rose on the gates of Scheol,' I think the painter is an African, from Kenya. Not really sure."

"Hmm, you of all people couldn't find out who painted this piece?" she said as she turned and faced him.

"At this moment," he said, "nothing should matter!" Tailor kissed her. He clapped and the lights went off.

Ever since Candy's first visit, Tailor Burdigan began to act like a man who was about to rob the bank of bachelorhood one precious coin. After getting to know Tailor one on one, Candy also felt trapped in a way; like she had engaged herself in an unremunerative war, and had appeared on the battle field unarmed and without a cause. She tried as much as she could to see if Tailor was aware of some of his dark deeds. She searched for, and tried so hard to hold on to just one good reason to end his life secretly or in the open when the right time is to establish itself, a part of her

hungered for vengeance but her heart had lost its grip on the grounds of common sense.

Candy welcomed the company of Catharina whenever she paid a visit to the house. The two bonded.

"Do you have kids?" asked Candy.

"Well, yes! I had a beautiful daughter and two boys, if she was alive, she would be about your age!" replied Catharina, "I lost them years back!"

"Oh I'm sorry, I didn't know!" responded Candy.

"No, it's okay! It's what one must bear once one chooses to walk the soils of this cruel and begrimed world!" responded Catherina, "I know you're going to make a fine and beautiful bride to Mr Tailor." added Catherina, "He is such a lucky man! Everybody loves and respects him!"

Candy smiled, "Who braided your hair! I'd love to have something like that!"

"Oh, thank you. It's Sarah, one of the maids in the house. I'll talk to her, she'd gladly do it for you madam!" answered Catharina.

"Please call me, Candy!" she said smiling humbly.

"Hello darling!" said Tailor as he walked into the living room escorted by his two bodyguards.

"Hey baby!" Candy responded.

"We've got a fund raising event to attend by 8pm, forgive me my darling I've totally forgot to inform you earlier." said Tailor.

"Okay baby, I haven't got much to do in the evening anyway!" replied Candy.

"I'm going to have to take a shower, rest for a while maybe take a nap." he said as he kissed her.

"Welcome back, sir." said Catharina as she stood up and walked into the kitchen.

"I've got something for the lady," said Tailor, he handed her a box of flowers, "sighted it in this corner shop downtown and thought you would love it!"

"Aww, thanks love! You could've just gotten a single stem, baby." Candy said on opening the box.

"Red roses, you like it?" he asked.

"I love it, smells nice," she answered.

"But not as nice as the smell of your wonderful breath darling," he said, "wait till you see the dress I got for you to wear tonight!"

As Tailor and Candy were about going upstairs, Catharina came by holding a glass of water on a tray.

"Let me have that Catharina," said Candy as she took the tray from her, "You can go attend to other things. I've got this!"

"Darling, let me shower first, I'll drink and eat thereafter," said Tailor as he walked upstairs.

Candy handed back the tray to Catharina. She followed Tailor to the bedroom. Tailor walked straight into the bathroom, then Candy got her purse and pulled out a small container.

"Guess what darling?" said Tailor as he came out of the bathroom.

"Yes, baby!" she replied, as she hid the container.

Tailor approached her and looked deep her in the eyes smiling, he grabbed her by waist gently, "Your eyes," he said, "they arrest my senses every time I look at them."

"Baby, was that what you wanted to tell me?" she said.

"Oh, sorry," he added, "I heard the president is going to be there. Been looking forward to meeting that man ever since he got on that seat. Maybe tonight will be our lucky night! Plus to make sure you take the night hostage, I got you the perfect dress for that!" he kissed her then walked away to a drawer and brought out a big black box.

"I hope she likes it!" he said as he handed it to her.

Candy opened the box to unveil an elegant evening crown-worthy pearl-covered dress. Candy could not believe her eyes, "Are these..."

"Black diamonds, yes!" said Tailor, "I went through a lot of trouble to have it custom made for you!" as he left the bed and

walked back to the wardrobe again. Tailor came back with another small box.

"Now, this...I bought it a long time ago, but I think it'll suit this outfit, darling." he pulled out a diamond necklace set on a white gold chain.

"Oh my God!" exclaimed Candy.

"Like a man once said, happy girls are the prettiest girls!" he stood up and wrapped the jewellery around her neck.

Minutes later, the two got into a pillow fight.

Candy had to go downstairs to check on Catherina, and by the time she got to the diner, Catharina had already set things ready.

"Wow! You're fast," said Candy.

"Fall in love with what you do," Catharina responded, "and everything will become much easier!"

"Return this to the cellar and help me get a red wine instead, "said Candy, "that's the only thing this beautiful table is missing!"

"Okay madam!" replied Catharina as she walked away.

Candy picked the wineglass kept on Tailor's side of the table, she quickly poured some droplets of the colourless liquid substance into the cup. Moments later, Catharina return with the bottle of red wine. As Tailor walked downstairs Candy popped the bottle and poured some into two wineglasses.

"Hey darling!" said Tailor as he approached the dining table.

"Hey!" Candy kissed him handing the wineglass to him.

"You're already making me feel like a king!" He whispered to her ear and bit it lightly.

"Because you are, my darling!" said Candy as she took a sip from her wineglass. Candy watched with great satisfaction as he lifted his cup to drink then they heard a thud.

"Oh my God!" said Tailor as he kept the wineglass on the table. Candy turned and saw Catharina lying on the ground, "Oh God!" she said as Tailor rushed to Catharina.

Tailor held Catharina but she was unconscious.

"Quickly, get Gerald!" said Tailor as he checked her pulse.

Minutes later two of the bodyguards had arrived with Candy but they found Catharina breathing and sweating.

"Is she okay?" asked Candy.

"Yes, she looks so, now!" answered Tailor, "you should take some days off Catharina!"

"No need, sir." said Catharina in a weak voice.

"You've been working like a donkey Catharina!" said Tailor as they all laughed, "You really need to rest!"

The bodyguards held Catharina and as they were about to lift her up off the floor, one of the bodyguards accidently hit the table and the glass of wine tailor kept fell off and shattered.

"Whoops!" exclaimed Tailor, "Get Sarah!"

"Alright boss!" Gerald responded.

"You should be the one to clean that up, Gerald!" said Catharina as they all laughed while walking away from the dining

"Is she going to be okay?" asked Candy.

"Oh yeah, she is stronger than she appeared!" Tailor answered.

Tailor and Candy left for the fund raising event after they had dinner. However, the president was not able to make it as Tailor had hoped. They had a wonderful night together. Candy stood out among the crowd and sea of celebrities, and the press ate her image like an exotic fruit.

Candy's heart continued to grow fond of Tailor, and she began to bask on the thrills and excitements that came with the new lifestyle she had doused into. It was as though everything she had discovered about him before meeting him in person was a lie. Tailor looked crystal clean from where she was standing, and he treated her like lady. She began to doubt whether the reason why her plans failed on the attempts she had made to end his life was probably a sign that his hands were clean.

The trips they had taken to most of the exotic places around the world, and the sweet thoughts of Tailor's charm, kindness, love and affection had almost wiped out the memories of Jake.

The things Candy wanted were being replaced by the things she needed in her life. It was very hard, especially knowing that one of Tailor's major goal was to make her happy. Ever since she came into his life, it was obvious he had rid it all of other unnecessary women. As weird as it may seemed, she felt light-hearted and had fallen, tumbling head over heels for Tailor.

Thinking about Jake became like a portal of nightmare she wouldn't want to find herself falling into. Tailor treated her in a way that made her worries flowed down the drain. Candy was giving room to the future thoughts of her probable life with Tailor, she had no choice but to believe that she had not seen the best things, yet. Then it happened, one night while on a trip to the Bahamas, Candy woke up and found out that Tailor was watching her while she was asleep.

"Baby, is everything okay?" she asked.

"You look seraphic when you sleep," he said, "I need to make one important request."

"What is it?" she inquired.

"Candy, Will you marry me?" he said looking straight into her eyes.

"Are you sure about this?" replied Candy in a soft tone.

"No, I'm not sure if I'm awake or still dreaming," he said, "but I'm sure about one thing; I love you, and in both realms I would still want to stand by you until my heartbeat stops!" he smiled as he pulled out a blue diamond ring.

Candy agreed to Tailor's proposal. He could not believe it, she literally wiped the tears from his eyes when he tried to express his joy that night.

On their return, Tailor didn't hesitate to pay the best wedding planner double the amount they normally charged just so Candy would have the best day a girl like her deserved. However, Candy wanted a grand church wedding and he knew he had to grant her wish.

"If you want an altar on the clouds...that can be arranged. But I can't give no wings to no priest, my love." Tailor said, "Just say the words!"

The date was set and all necessary arrangements were made to make it the most talked about wedding in the beach city, the media houses cleared their throats as well, even those that weren't invited.

Candy walked into the church followed by her maid of honour, Mellissa. Laura and some other ladies joined the train, as Candy gently walked down the aisle she sighted Tailor. She bent her head down in a modest way, her dad walked right next to her holding her hand.

The priest made some declaration and asked the couple to exchange their marital vows and rings, after that they kissed and all left for the reception in a beautiful hotel in the heart of the city. The wedding was a grandeur, it was a great event and lots of Tailor's business associates, local celebrities and some prominent people came to celebrate with them; they danced and had fun, Candy looked very happy and her dad was pleased to see his daughter in such aura of joy once again. Mellissa and Laura gave a beautiful speech and expressed how happy they were to see Candy marry the man of her dreams.

The aids in the house of Tailor convinced him to grant them the privilege to give a speech as well. Catharina was chosen as their representative and she was given some minutes to talk on their behalf, she was so excited, and she couldn't wait to hold the microphone.

"Please make it short!" said the MC as he handed the microphone to Catherina.

"Life is beautiful, and I'm very happy today to have witnessed this great occasion." Catherina said, "Candy is a wonderful woman, and she had met a great, kind and wonderful angel. You see, Sometimes when you have laid your hands on the most precious thing in life, especially when it's priceless, the world would come and just seize it from you for no good reason.

Sometimes you would begin to feel like the world hates you for no just cause! But we must stay strong and open our hearts and hope for better days ahead," she smiled, the invited guests clapped and cheered. Catharina turned and looked at the couple, she smiled as they smiled back at her. Then it happened; Catharina lifted her clothe and pulled out a Kahr CW9, 9mm luger handgun; cocked and aimed it at Candy, then quickly turned the pistol to Tailor and pulled the trigger; she shot him at point blank on the forehead, "This is for my children, and the people of Undango," she said. As the entire guest panicked, Catherina stared at Candy, smiled and sighed, as though she just did her a great favour. Catharina then turned her back on Candy putting the pistol in her own mouth and fired a short once more.

People began to run out of the reception venue as Tailor's bodyguards made their way in disbelieve. Candy found herself holding the corpse of Tailor Burdigan, her husband. The blood and brain tissues of Catherina was all over her face and wedding gown. Suddenly the whole world watched as the passionate tears fail from her eyes; if only they knew, it might not be of young woman widowed on her wedding day, not of been humiliated, not of been the pathetic woman who the world will carry the face of the latest scandal of losing her spouse, not of been the person feeding the paparazzi of images of herself but maybe the loss of the pleasure of murdering him herself or sleeping with an enemy until the day she had her fill and decide to close the dark curtains on him.

Candy could not say a word to anyone, loss had confined her world once again. She watched people run, as some stare; was it sympathy or contempt? She just could not tell what was going on in their mind as her mind drifted down into the depths of nowhere.

Later that night, Candy realised that her late husband had bought a soft custom-made pillow stuffed with the finest white goose feathers, no diamonds in it but they all had her name crested

on the sheets. She could not lay her head on it. A live footage of Tailor's murder went viral online, showing Candy screaming next to him in shock. She remained mute, in shock and didn't talk to anyone until the third day after Tailor's murder.

Tailor Burdigan was led to rest about two weeks after his death, it rained that day, and a lot of people came for the funeral including her dad and friends. On that day, Candy made another shocking discovery; Tailor had fathered about four children with three different women.

"She would make such a beautiful widow!" whispered one of the women at the funeral. Candy turned and looked around but could not tell who among the people uttered such, she lowered her head down and wept looking at the golden ring on her finger. Candy could not talk to most of the people that came to sympathise with her.

Candy went back to the big mansion and could not look into the eyes of her maids and bodyguards. They had all been interrogated by the authority, and it was established that none of them played any intended role in the ploy. Catherina manipulated them all along. After an in-depth investigation, the authorities found out that Catherina did not suffer any child lost, and it was also proven that she was not from Undango. Something didn't just add up. What was Catherina's motive and was she working for someone?

Candy laid on the big bed as she stared at the ceiling, she sobbed as she twisted and turned on the bed. Candy wept and drenched the pillow with her tears, she tried to sleep but couldn't. As she sat silently on the edge of the bed, something on the wall caught her attention; a replica of Touzhius Alejandre's 'Scent of the Son'. It appeared Tailor had replaced 'The White Rose on the gates of Scheol,' painting with it. Candy sighed and smiled, for it reminded her so much of his humour, She then summoned courage and walked towards the painting and stood there admiring its dynamism once more.

Candy smiled and as tears rolled down her eyes, she wiped it with her right hand, then closed her eyes and touched the painting with her left hand in order to feel its texture, and the stroke from the painter's brush that appeased her senses. But then she noticed that the frame was too stiff. Out of curiosity, Candy used her two hands to try moving the painting but it stood firm. She then ignored it and turned to go back to bed but something stirred inside of her, Candy walked back and pulled the left side of the painting; it swung open on a hinge; the painting was used to conceal a hidden safe on the wall. It was a digital safe with a passcode entry, and the safe was locked.

Candy didn't seem startled by what she had uncovered, but she stared at it for quite some time. She appeared a bit puzzled as she hurriedly searched for a pen and paper from the bedroom, she got it and then walked back to the safe and scribbled a word on the paper, then deciphered it into numbers. Candy took a deep breath, with a shaky hand, she pressed 2-5-3-8-4-3-2 on the digital keypad.

The safe came open.

Candy took a step back, then quickly ran and locked the bedroom door. She returned to check the safe; she found a bundle of cash stacked together, an old thick book that appeared to be Touzhius Alejandre's diary, a journal, some documents, four VHS tapes and some computer hardware. Candy took some of these documents and as she flipped through them, she came across a copy of what appeared to be her late husband's will. Tailor Burdigan had divided his fortune; properties and entire wealth to be shared to his illegitimate children.

Candy gently closed the safe, put her back up against the wall and slid her body down still holding on to some of these documents. As she squatted, Jake's thoughts flashed through her mind, Candy coerced a smiled out as she took a heavy sigh.

While all the maids and bodyguards stayed mute downstairs reminiscing about their beloved late boss, they could hear the

groaning of a young widow from upstairs; Candy T. Burdigan, the mistress of the house.

Hi, thank you for reading my book. If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to leave me a review?

Thanks!

Richard Shekari.

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